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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to determine which parent involvement strategies are used in Mississippi and which strategies are perceived as important by the states' parents, administrators, and teachers. Fifty school districts were randomly selected for the study. Questionnaires were distributed to parents, teachers, and one elementary and one secondary principal from each district, for a total of 400 parents, 200 teachers, and 100 principals. The questionnaire provided a list of parent involvement strategies (the use of advisory committees, open house, receptions, and so forth) and asked respondents to select the five most important strategies. Respondents also indicated which strategies were used in their school and ranked the five most important strategies in their school. The response rate was 38 percent. Results revealed that all three groups selected parent-teacher conferences as the primary parent involvement strategy. However, almost 62 percent of the respondents indicated that parent-teacher conferences were not held in their schools. Parents identified homework as one of their top five strategies, but teachers and administrators did not. A sample questionnaire is appended. (MM)

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EFFECTIVE PARENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES

AS IDENTIFIED BY PARENTS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND TEACHERS

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Introduction

The importance of the role of parents in their children's education is not a new concept. Parents have been recognized as their children's first teachers since the beginning of time. Even in the early Greek society they saw children as their future. In the *Republic*, Plato (427-347 B.C.) referred to the parents' responsibility of educating their children and cautioned parents that what children heard in the home could influence their character (Plato, 1953). However, it was not until 1815, in the United States that the first education classes for parents were held in Portland, Maine (Brim, 1965). With the increased attention on early childhood education in the latter 1800's, it was recognized that the parent must be involved in the children's education to support the teaching of the school. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) was organized in 1897. One of their major goals was to work with poor families to help them understand the current knowledge about child care and family life. This goal was implemented in the early 1900's (Scholossman, 1976).

Many changes in the role of the parents have taken place during the 20th century. Comer (1986) identifies direct parent participation in the schools of today as a necessary institutional adjustment due to the changed relationship between home and school brought about by the technological, scientific, and social changes since the 1940's. Recognizing these changes, Coleman (1987) stated that an effective school must change as local families change and must adjust to the conditions of the institutions it complements.

Research documenting the positive impact of the education on young children opened the way for the establishment of Headstart in 1965 by the Office of Economic

Opportunity. Parent involvement was an important component in the success of this program causing other educational programs to include parent involvement in their development (Berger, 1991).

In 1966 the landmark Equality of Educational Opportunity Report stated that family environment was more strongly related to student achievement in school than any other variable. This report added much emphasis to the importance of the role of the parents in their children's education (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland & Mood, 1966). Evidence for the impact of parent involvement began to grow steadily in the 1970's. Bronfenbrenner (1974) reviewed the research and found that significant levels of parent involvement were a component of successful early education programs. Based on a synthesis of 50 studies on parent involvement, Henderson (1987) confirmed the correlation between parent involvement and student achievement. Consequently, the framers of Public Law 94-142 of 1975 addressed the inclusion of the parents of handicapped children as a requirement in the development of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). In 1986 an amendment was added that included an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) to assist in meeting the needs of the child and family.

When working with families involved in the federally funded program, Parent Education Follow Through, Ira Gordan identified the impact of schools and families working together and learning from each other. "Teachers and school administrators, or any other professionals... need to learn new attitudes toward parents, new skills in communications and group processes and sharing" (Gordan, 1977, p. 77). Results of studies conducted on Parent Education Follow Through programs indicated that parents must play several critical roles in their children's education. These roles must be planned, comprehensive and long lasting in order to be more effective (Gordan, 1977).

Epstein (1987) studied teacher techniques for involving parents in their children's education. A survey of 3700 first, third, and fifth grade teachers and their principals in 16 Maryland school districts was conducted. More than 1200 parents were surveyed and the achievement and behavior of over 2100 students were recorded. This research recognized that all parents cannot be active at school although almost all parents were involved with their children at home. More than 85 percent of the parents spent over 15 minutes a day helping their children at home when asked by the teacher. In another study conducted by Epstein (1986), it was found that parents would be willing to spend more time if their children's teachers would give more direction as to how to assist with specific skills.

Epstein (1984) found that there is a dramatic decline in parent involvement as the child becomes older. It was found that parents of first graders were more involved in school activities than parents of fifth graders. Teachers of upper elementary lacked frequent communication with the parents and parents felt less able to assist their children in reading and math. Lucas and Lusthaus (1978) found this trend to get more pronounced in secondary school. However, Dornbusch and Ritter (1988) cited that parent attendance at athletic events and other high school activities highly correlated with student achievement even when ethnic and social class were controlled.

A variety of factors have been identified as the cause of a lack of parent involvement in the school. In a study done in the Chicago Elementary schools in 1988, it was found that most inner city parents had negative experiences in school and passed negative attitudes on to their children. Other parents simply felt powerless and did not know what to do (Menacker, Hurwitz and Weldon, 1988). Some school personnel have discouraged parent involvement in the school or have not been open to nontraditional

roles of parent involvement. Chavkin and Williams (1985) found that parents were very interested in the roles of advocate and decision-maker while the teachers and administrators surveyed thought that having parents in these roles was not very important. The 13th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward Public Schools (Gallup, 1981) found that while respondents favored parent involvement, they also indicated that lack of interest of both parents and teachers was a major problem.

Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler and Brissie (1987) found that teachers believing in their own teacher effectiveness was the greatest predictor of parent involvement. The research of Swick (1988) supported this concept; however, it added parent efficacy as a critical variable in effective parent involvement. Moles (1987) stated a need for specialized training for teachers in both undergraduate curriculum and staff development to provide parent involvement skills. It becomes evident through research like this that school personnel play an important part to ensure meaningful parent involvement.

A nationwide poll in 1981 found that 90% of teachers favored home-school interaction (National Education Association, 1981). In a 1979 survey, Cantril found that two-thirds of all parents had met with their child's teacher, but less than a fourth of all parents with incomes under $7000 had a contact with the teacher. In a study of six San Francisco high schools, Dornbusch and Ritter (1988) reported the lowest parent involvement among minority, single parent and step family situations. In the same study it was indicated that teachers had little contact with parents of the average students. Only 15 percent of the teachers responding to the survey reported contacts with "most or almost all" of their parents.

The role of the principal is crucial in the successful development and implementation of an effective parent involvement program (Berninger and Rodriguez,

1989). In particular, the administrator must coordinate, manage, support, fund and recognize parent involvement in order for teachers to successfully involve parents (Epstein, 1987).

The PTA recently held a "Parent Involvement Summit" where results of a nationwide survey were announced. As reported in *Education Week* (1992) the survey of 4800 PTA chapter presidents revealed that while 85 percent of the respondents said that "administrators in their schools support parental and family involvement, 65 percent did not know whether their school district had a specific parent involvement policy. Of the 40 percent who did know, half said their school has a policy and half said it does not." Other results included findings that 30 percent said that their school had parental involvement training for faculty and 90 percent of the respondents identified lack of time and conflicts in work schedules as major barriers in preventing them from being more involved in their children's schools.

Becker and Epstein (1982) cited many benefits other than improved student achievement of teachers making parent involvement part of their regular activities. Students whose parents were more involved in school had a more positive attitude toward school and rated the teachers as better teachers. Additional benefits of parent involvement were that teachers learn more about students' needs and home environments.

A majority of today's schools operate within a traditional middle-class framework. Therefore, educators must be sensitive to children from low-income and minority families. These children have a better chance of succeeding when the school and family work together. An extra effort must be made to include families that do not usually become involved. The parents need to become part of the solution rather than the part

of the problem schools are facing today. The children are the nation's future and a collaborative effort must be expected to overcome the challenges ahead. It is the responsibility of the school and the family to work closely together to provide children with the necessary education and support to prepare them to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

The research on parent involvement suggests clearly that the home is as influential on the child's learning as the teacher and the school. It is thus evident that the most effective educational program would include the home and the school working together for the success of the child.

Most schools already have a variety of parent involvement activities. An overview of research on parent involvement seems to indicate that a major difference between good schools and great schools is the level and quality of parent involvement. Davies (1987) contends that "Because of the reform climate, there is an opportunity for parents, administrators, teachers, and policymakers to produce plans for parent involvement that will work in the 1980's and 1990's." That time is now.

The Problem

The research problem in this study was to determine what parents, teachers and administrators perceived as the most meaningful parent involvement strategies their school could implement. These strategies were selected from a list of 25 activities most commonly identified in the literature. In addition, the three identified groups were asked to indicate the current parent involvement practices used in their schools and rank the selected activities based on importance. The following questions were answered in the study:

1. What did parents, teachers and administrators perceive as the most meaningful parent involvement practices that should be used in their schools?
2. What strategies did parents, teachers and administrators currently use in their schools to involve parents to promote parent involvement.
3. Was there a difference among the three groups (parents, teachers, and administrators) in their selection of the five most frequently selected parent involvement strategies?
4. Was there a difference between each gender in what each group perceived as the most meaningful parent involvement strategies?
5. Was there a difference between each race in what each group perceived as the most meaningful parent involvement strategies?

Design

The study consisted of the following steps:

(1) Random selection of 50 school districts in Mississippi .

(2) Development of a Parent Involvement Questionnaire

(3) Dissemination the Parent Involvement Questionnaire

(4) Collection and analysis of data

This descriptive study was conducted to determine what parent involvement strategies are being practiced in Mississippi and which are perceived as being important by randomly selected parents, administrators, and teachers in the state.

In the spring of 1992, 50 of the 151 school districts in Mississippi were randomly selected to participate in the study. The superintendent of each of the 50 selected districts was mailed a packet of information including the parent involvement

questionnaires and procedural instructions. The superintendent was instructed to select one elementary and one secondary principal in the district to participate in the study. Then each selected principal was asked to complete a parent involvement questionnaire, and select the first and third teacher on the faculty roll to repeat the same procedure. Each of the selected teachers was instructed to select the first and third child on their homeroom roll and was directed to ask the parents of these children to respond to the parent involvement questionnaire. Principals, teachers, and parents returned their completed questionnaires in self-addressed stamped envelopes. The identified population included 100 principals, 200 teachers and 400 parents in Mississippi.

The parent involvement questionnaire was developed from a review of the current literature on parent involvement. A copy of the parent involvement questionnaire can be examined in Appendix A. A panel composed of parents and teachers reviewed the 25 strategies and the questionnaire procedures to establish the content validity of the instrument. A cover letter explaining the directions for completing and returning the questionnaire was prepared and included with each questionnaire. The questionnaire procedures instructed each selected participant to review the list of activities and rank the top five strategies that they perceived were most meaningful for increasing parent involvement out of the 25 listed strategies. Next, the selected participants were directed to check the strategies from the same list that were most frequently practiced in their schools and then rank the checked strategies according to their perceived importance. Out of 287 questionnaires returned, 259 were completed properly and were usable. The following is a profile of the returned questionnaires by number and the percentage for each group surveyed.

Groups	Number Returned	Percent Returned
400 Parents	135	33.75%
100 Administrators	46	46%
200 Teachers	78	39%

The total percentage of returns for the study was 38 percent representing 37 different school districts out of 50 selected districts in Mississippi. The timing of the study could have contributed to a lower return rate. The size of the sample was greatly reduced due to the low number of questionnaires returned. Lack of follow-up probably contributed to the low number of returns and is an identified weakness of the study. From the 38 percent return, it cannot be assumed that the responses were random. Studies have indicated that there are systematic differences in the population who return questionnaires compared to non-responders (Bennett and Hill, 1964). It could be speculated that the responding group may be more educated and interested in parent involvement than the non-respondents.

Out of the 259 individuals responding to the questionnaire, 26 percent were males and 64 percent were females. Approximately 40 percent were minorities, primarily African-American, while 60 percent were Caucasian.

Results of Study

The data were recorded for analysis using frequencies and crosstabs. The data were studied collectively and then disaggregated to be examined more closely for each of the three segments of the population involved in the study. The selected top five strategies were given reverse value scores, totaled, and then divided by the number of subjects to obtain the weighted mean score for each item. The results of the analysis of data indicated the highest weighted mean score value was given to the strategy of

Parent/Teacher Conferences (2.1). It was rated by all three of the groups surveyed as the most meaningful parent involvement activity. The second most frequently selected strategy was *Advisory Committees Involving Parents* (1.13) which received less than half of the weighted mean score of the first selected item. The last three activities selected out of the top five by the total group received less than a weighted value of 1. The strategies selected were *Parent Contact* (.96), *Open Houses* (.92), and *Parent Visitation Days* (.80). The results of these findings can be more closely examined in Table 1 of this report.

When examining the responses in Table 2 for parents, administrators, and teachers, individually, *Parent/Teachers Conferences* was overwhelmingly the number one choice of surveyed parents, teachers, and administrators. Administrators gave this strategy the highest rating of 2.36 while teachers gave it a 2.15 and parents a 1.91. *Open House* and *Parent Contacts* were also included in the top five selections for all three groups.

Table 2 also shows parents to be the only group that identified *Homework* in the top five strategies by ranking it fourth. Parents and administrators included *Advisory Committees Involving Parents* in the top five strategies. Teachers did not include this strategy in the top five, although they did include *Parent Education Workshops*. The data seems to indicate that parents feel homework is an important aspect of what they perceive schools to be doing. Neither administrators nor teachers selected *Homework* in the list of their top five choices of strategies. Meanwhile, teachers perceived providing more education for parents as a meaningful strategy to increase parent involvement since it was ranked third on their list and did not appear on the lists for the other two groups.

The study was composed of 65 males and 187 females. Almost three times as many females returned questionnaires as males. There was little difference in the

responses based on gender except that males ranked *Open House* second and females ranked it fifth. Males rated *Open House* 1.38 but it only received a weighted mean of .76 by females responding to the questionnaire. Table 3 depicts the data reported by gender and these differences can be noted.

Both African-Americans and Caucasians agreed that *Parent/Teacher Conferences* was the most meaningful parent involvement strategy listed. *Parent Education Workshops* and *Advisory Committee* tied for second place among the African-Americans surveyed. *Parent Education* was not included in the top five sections for the Caucasian population responding to the questionnaire. Caucasians listed *Parent Contacts* as second and included *Advisory Committees* as third. When comparing the responses of the two races, the first choice was the same for both groups and *Open House, Advisory Committees* and *Homework* were included in the top five selections. The results of these findings are summarized in Table 4.

Table 5 reflects the percentage of times on the parent involvement questionnaire that the participants selected the perceived parent involvement strategy and also indicated that it was practiced in their particular school. Results are reported in percentages for the total group and then denoted for each the three subgroups. An analysis of variance was used to calculate an F value for the purpose of comparing the responses of parents, administrators, and teachers for each of the reported strategies.

The strategy of *Parent/Teacher Conferences* received 38.22 which was the largest percentage of agreement for the total population. This item was also selected as the most important factor as a perceived parent involvement strategy by all three of the groups surveyed. When looking at the subgroups individually, administrators (54.35) responded more strongly than either parents (31.85) or teachers (39.74). The F value of

3.80 indicated that the administrators felt implemented practices paralleled desired practices to a significantly higher extent than either parents or teachers. It can be observed from this data that almost 62 percent of the population responding to the questionnaire indicated *Parent/Teacher Conferences* were not being utilized in their schools. This, however, was the most meaningful parent involvement strategy selected by all three components of the surveyed population.

The parent involvement strategy, *Open House*, was identified as the second item of highest agreement. Approximately 20 percent of the total population selected this item although it should be noted that this percentage is almost less than half of the first selected strategy. However, no significant difference was observed among the parents, administrators, and teachers.

Items number 3-8 displayed in Table 5 had percentage of agreements ranging from 16.22 down to 12.36. Administrators, along with teachers, had greater agreement for the strategy of *Parent Contacts* than parents. Parents perceived this parent involvement strategy to be implemented significantly less than did both administrators and teachers. ($F = 3.65$, $p < .05$).

The percentage for administrators reported implementation of perceived practices for the strategies of *Advisory Committees Involving Parents* was greater than both parents and teachers. The percentage of 34.78 for administrators was significantly higher than both parents and teachers ($F = 9.60$, $p < .01$).

Teachers selected *PTA Participation or Fundraising* more frequently than the other two groups. The F value was 2.29 produced a .10 level of significance.

Parents selected *Homework* and *Student Work Sent Home* as strategies where implementation of perceived strategies appeared to be higher than either parents or

administrators. The difference between the selections of the three components of the population needs to be examined further in order to address the improvement of parent involvement programs.

IMPLICATIONS

The parent involvement strategies selected by all three groups are not costly. Administrators and teachers must first recognize the value of parent involvement and then set goals for implementation of programs which will encourage such involvement in the schools. Educators should take a close look at the strategies where a level of significance was observed among the groups and then work to diminish these differences among the perceptions of parents, administrators and teachers.

Since *Parent/Teacher Conferences* surfaced as the number one strategy selected by all three groups, more focus needs to be directed to ensure that pre-service teachers and experienced teachers receive training in this area. Teacher preparation programs need to prepare future teachers to relate to parents. School districts should offer in-service training on how to conduct meaningful *Parent/Teacher Conferences*. Parents will also need to be involved in receiving information and training as to what they can do to have a more meaningful conference with their child's teacher.

Additional research needs to be conducted and disseminated on parent involvement. Researchers need to examine the type of parent involvement that works best for junior and senior high students.

With the advent of the National Education Goals the schools are going to have to examine their leadership and solicit the collaborated efforts of the families in the communities. Thus, it is not enough for schools to be committed to achieving these goals. It is going to take the participation of parents, businesses and all other concerned

citizens. There is a need for an alliance to emerge from the recognition that not only schools are important to parents and families but that schools also need the support of parents and families for their success.

Table 1

Weighted Mean Scores for Parental Involvement Strategies Perceived as Most Important by Parents, Administrators and Teachers as a Total Group (N = 252)

Parent Involvement Strategies	$\bar{X}$
Parent/Teacher Conferences	2.1
Advisory Committee Involving Parents	1.13
Parent Contacts	.96
Open House	.92
Parent Visitation Days	.80

Table 2

Mean Scores and Rankings for Parent Involvement Strategies Perceived as Most Important by Parents, Administrators, and Teachers

	Parents (N = 128) $\bar{X}$	Administrators (N = 45) $\bar{X}$	Teachers (N = 78) $\bar{X}$
Parent/Teacher Conferences	1.91 (1)	2.36 (1)	2.15 (1)
Advisory Committees	1.16 (2)	1.56 (2)	NL*
Parent Contacts	.93 (3)	.96 (4)	1.03 (2)
Open House	.83 (5)	1.29 (3)	.87 (5)
Parent Visitation Days	NL*	.75 (5)	.96 (4)
Parent Education Workshops	NL*	NL*	.97 (3)
Homework	.88 (4)	NL*	NL*

*NOT LISTED IN TOP 5

Table 3

Weighted Mean Scores for Parental Inovlvement Strategies Perceived as Most Important by Gender

Male (N = 65)	$\bar{X}$	Females (N = 187)	$\bar{X}$
Parent/Teacher Conferences	1.85	Parent/Teacher Conferences	2.14
Open House	1.38	Advisory Committee	1.05
Advisory Committee	1.35	Parent Contacts	1.00
Parent Visitation Days	.88	Parent Visitation Days	.77
Parent Contacts	.86	Open House	.76

Table 4

Weighted Mean Scores for Parental Involvement Strategies Perceived as Most Important by Race

African-American (N = 95)	$\bar{X}$	Caucasian (N = 151)	$\bar{X}$
Parent/Teacher Conferences	1.80	Parent/Teacher Conferences	2.23
Parent Education Workshops	1.17	Parent Contacts	1.10
Advisory Committee	1.17	Advisory Committee	1.07
Open House	.92	Open House	.97
Parent Visitation Days	.89	Homework	.81
Homework	.81		

Table 5

Percent of Times Exact Agreement
for Perceived and Practiced Parent Involvement Strategies

Strategies	Total Group (259)	Parents (135)	Admin. (46)	Teachers (78)	F, Probability
1. Parent/Teacher Conferences	38.22	31.85	54.35	39.74	3.80 (.02)
2. Open House	20.85	18.52	26.09	21.79	.62 (.54)
3. Parent Contacts	16.22	10.37	23.91	21.79	3.65 (.03)
4. Advisory Committee	15.06	8.89	34.78	14.10	9.60 (.00)
5. PTA Participation or Fundraising	14.67	11.85	10.87	21.79	2.29 (.10)
6. Homework	12.36	14.81	8.70	10.26	.81 (.44)
7. Student Work Sent Home	13.13	15.56	6.52	12.82	1.22 (.29)
8. Parent Visitation Days	12.36	10.37	17.39	12.82	.79 (.46)

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APPENDIX

Below are 25 parent involvement activities listed in alphabetical order. Please select 5 that you feel are most important for increasing parent involvement and place numbers 1-5 in front of those activities with number 1 being the most desired and so on. Next, on the right of the activities listed, please check each parent involvement activity currently being used by your school. Then rate only the activity you have selected starting with number 1 until all of the selected items have been given a number based on how important you feel they are to you in your school.

5 best strategies for increasing parent involvement		Parent Involvement activities used in your school ✔	#
	Advisory committees involving parents		
	Family literacy programs		
	Good news calls from the school		
	Home visits		
	Homework		
	Informational materials sent home		
	New student orientation packets		
	Open house		
	Outreach programs to community		
	Parent contacts		
	Parent education workshop		
	Parent handbook		
	Parent interest surveys		
	Parent-support groups		
	Parent-teacher conferences		
	Parent visitation days		
	Parent volunteers		
	Parents as resource people		
	Parents assisting in classrooms		
	Planned home reading and math programs		
	PTA participation or fundraising		
	Reception/lunch for parents		
	Schools and/or classroom newsletters		
	Student recognition messages		
	Student's work sent home		